

Core Values: The Foundation of Leadership  
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*Introduction*

The United States of America began by establishing its core values in the Declaration of Independence, which reads, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”<sup>1</sup> The core values of equality, freedom, and opportunity were established for this Nation in the Declaration of Independence. These core values provided the focus by which this country moved towards greatness and created a source of contention from within to ensure that all citizens receive equal and fair treatment.

From the example of the United States establishing core values, leaders must determine their own core values. Identifying and establishing individual, as well as, organizational core values is a critical function if leaders are to bring their organization to high performance. Leaders’ goals, decisions, and actions must be aligned with their core values to obtain personal and organizational success.

This chapter examines the importance of establishing core values and posits that the process for establishing them should be a vital part of individual goal setting and organizational goal- and vision-setting. In *On Becoming a Leader*, Warren Bennis writes, “Until you truly know yourself, strengths and weaknesses, and know what you want to do and why you want to do it, you cannot succeed in any but the most superficial sense of the word.”<sup>2</sup> Leaders who truly know themselves understand the importance that values have on motivating and inspiring others. By knowing and understanding the role that values have on our motivational system, leaders can appreciate the importance of aligning core values with goals and objectives. When this alignment is accomplished, leaders can easily achieve success for themselves and their organization.

*What are Core Values?*

Core values are the center of our being. The center as defined by *Webster’s New World Dictionary* is “the point around which anything revolves; a point of origin, as of influence, ideas or action.”<sup>3</sup> Our values provide a point of reference for all that we think, believe, and do. To illustrate how our values relate to a human’s center, observe Figure 1. “The onion analogy depicts how our values are linked to our actions and responses. When interacting with another individual, the first noticeable observation is behavior. Behavior is the derivative of their attitude. Their attitude is generated from their beliefs.”<sup>4</sup> According to Army Field Manual 6-22, *Army Leadership*, “beliefs are convictions that people hold as true, based on their experiences, and they provide a starting point for what to do in everyday situations. Values and beliefs are central to character.”<sup>5</sup>

The further leaders analyze people, the better they will understand why people behave and think as they do, people’s motives, and the source of people’s energy. Values are at the core of all that people do, believe, and think.



Figure 1: Onion Analogy

It is important that leaders identify their own core values. According to FM 6-22, “These values become an empowering set of personal guidelines that serve as anchor points for leading, coaching, and mentoring others for success. They provide the focus of what people do and why they do it. Values become the convictions that provide the internal stimulus towards a desired or preferred outcome.”<sup>6</sup> A system of values defines purpose and motivation in life.

As values provide motivation in individuals for drive and determination, values in an organization provide the motivation for its continued existence. “Values are beacons that guide the pursuit of goals and objectives without losing its identity or its importance.”<sup>7</sup> In *Core Values: The Precondition for Business Excellence*, Su Mi Park Dahlgaard states:

Systematic leadership development for business excellence demands transformation of our mental models. This requires a profound understanding of so-called core values (intangibles) and their relation to the traditional tangibles (goals and core competencies). Often core values are not clearly identified, and they are seldom deployed with the same enthusiasm as the goals and core competencies needed for business excellence. It was assumed that if core values are neglected in the policy deployment process, it will never be possible to achieve business excellence.<sup>8</sup>

The process of goal setting and values determination is critical for individual leaders to obtain personal or organizational success. “Effective goals are best established after thoroughly thinking through your values and composing a personal mission statement.” The process of goal setting and values determination must be conducted together to clearly understand the true purpose of a leader. Newberry states, “The best way to keep your commitment to reach a goal is to understand why you are striving for it. It’s the “why” (or link to your values) that keep you motivated.”<sup>9</sup>

#### *Where Values Come From*

Personal experiences in earlier years helps form core values. Parents, siblings, role models, relatives, friends, and the institutions attended all are part of forming core values. Young children who participate in Boy or Girl Scouts are exposed to the Scout Oath, laws, motto, and slogan. The scouting experience helps shape its members into whom they become.

In addition to developing values from scouting, parental teaching is paramount in developing values. Parents instill positive values such as a strong work ethic, resilience, honesty, integrity, and a sense of service. This learning is the foundation and support structure of individuals. The values that leaders and followers learned early in life become part of how they act and respond. Leaders and followers can determine or validate their own core values using the instructions at Figure 2 and the Personal Core Values Table at Figure 3.

### *Personal Core Values*

Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson, great golfers who are ranked number one and number two in the world respectively, demonstrate how parental teaching and professional role models provide the foundation for core values. Woods espouses the value of “service” to the community. This value was shared with him (from both parents) early as a child. The opportunity to serve the community is shown by the development of junior golf programs and the building of a multi-million dollar learning center.

Mickelson not only espouses the values of his parents, but he also adopted values from professional role models. As an amateur playing in his first Augusta National Masters Tournament, he observed the behaviors of Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicholas. He noticed how they respected the gallery and workers that supported the tournament. Today as a seasoned veteran, Mickelson always makes it a priority to respect the volunteers who support every tournament. His enthusiasm and energy can be observed as he greets spectators, volunteers, and opponents. This was a lesson learned from two excellent role models. As the top leaders in the golfing world, Woods and Mickelson continue to demonstrate their core values.

### *Leadership Defined*

So what is leadership? This question is often asked; but the best definition can only come from within, reflecting the real meaning constructed by each person. To understand how values influence leadership, leaders must first know what it means. Army Field Manual 6- 22 states, “Leadership is influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation while operating to accomplish the mission and improving the organization.” Army leadership consists of three levels of leadership: direct, organizational, and strategic. The following explanation provides a definition and examples of direct, organizational, and strategic leadership.

Direct leadership is face-to-face, first-line leadership where followers see their leaders at all times. Direct leaders’ span of influence may range from a handful to several hundreds of people. Organizational leaders influence several hundred to several thousand people. Organizational leaders have staff that helps them lead their people and manage their organization’s resources. Strategic leaders are responsible for large organizations, and they influence several thousand to hundreds of thousand of people. They establish force structure, allocate resources, communicate strategic vision, and prepare their organizations and America’s Army as a whole for future roles.<sup>10</sup>

## *Individual Leadership Values*

Leading others at any level, whether direct, organizational, or strategic requires leaders to know themselves first. A critical part of knowing themselves is to understand what motivates them and what they value. Leaders develop their orientation to their leadership style based on self-awareness and drive. It is from this understanding that leaders are able to provide critical influence and direction, whether at the direct, organizational, and strategic level.

Daniel Goleman states, “Leadership operates at its best through emotionally intelligent leaders who create resonance.” Goleman believes that these leaders show strong leadership strengths in areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. These emotionally intelligent skills are not innate talents, but are learned abilities that make these leaders effective.<sup>11</sup>

Leaders who are emotionally intelligent understand their strengths and weaknesses and are able to include their values in their leadership style. It is from these values, coupled with their drive and desire to succeed, that leaders draw the energy to motivate and lead their followers. When leaders incorporate the instincts that come with emotional intelligence with their personal value system, they become competent, agile leaders who can adapt in challenging situations.

The brain uses a hierarchy to prioritize beliefs from what is desired as most important to those things that are least important. For example, if the thought of mentoring high-performing followers appeals to leaders, they may find it highly inspirational, but if they must discipline low-performers, they might find it less motivating. When leaders identify their own values, they can visualize where they want to go and then make relationships with their followers that will help them get there.

To compare value-centered leadership with the character of a leader, Sankar states:

The quest for leadership excellence is based more on character than charisma. The character of the leader is grounded in such core values as integrity, trust, truth, and human dignity, which influences the leader’s vision, ethics, and behavior. The moral literacy of the leader and the essentials of an ethical culture are connected to the leader’s character and not to a charismatic personality.<sup>12</sup>

Leaders of character are not born; they develop their character from their daily experiences and from those things that they consider as most important . . . their core values. In contrast, charisma focuses on style, image, self-confidence, admiration, and impression, but it is not grounded in core values. Charisma is self-serving versus character, which is firmly built on ethics and values. Lifelong learning together with emotional intelligence strengthens the self-awareness of leaders, which allows them the opportunity to lead their followers and their organization to success. “The result of value-centered leadership is building a ship of leaders.”<sup>13</sup>

## *Values in Organizations*

Leaders, in conjunction with their followers, establish the core values by which the organization will operate by developing a strategic plan. When all members have input into that which the organization deems important, they are more likely to accept and live by those values. “Values that come from properly modeled and reinforced founders can live on in organizations through many subsequent generations of leaders.”<sup>14</sup>

An example of a company built on its founder’s values is Hallmark Card Company. Joyce Hall built his organization around his personal values of quality, excellence, service, and caring for his followers and his customers. These values are still intact in the Hallmark Card Company today, 22 years after Hall’s death. The employees know and live the values and vision of the company; they stay with this organization because they believe in and embrace those values; and they enjoy working there because of them. Hallmark employees say, “The values and the vision is the lifeblood of Hallmark.”<sup>15</sup>

Organizational values are critical for any organization. Leaders who identify core values and incorporate them to the organization’s vision, mission, and goals sanction those values and make it known that the organization will be accountable for its behavior. An organization’s personality and culture are attached to its values and determine its success or failure. Leaders must not only espouse the values and behaviors by which their organization lives, but they also must emulate them in their everyday professional and personal lives because their followers are watching. If leaders fail to live by the values they themselves establish, their followers will not live by them either, and the organization will fall into disorder.

True effectiveness means using “leadership influences to unite the organization’s efforts toward and beyond the bottom line. It means achieving goals and objectives in such a way that the team is still intact, morale is high, and people are lined up to be on the team.”<sup>16</sup> Every organization and every person within it has a value system, but leaders must set the standard by demonstrating and supporting their followers through education, coaching, counseling, and mentoring them to succeed. The success of followers is directly related to the success of leaders and the success of the organization and the Army. Triumphant outcomes result in positive influence throughout the organization.

When leaders identify core values and keep them in mind, they build a solid foundation by which they can view their daily lives, their actions, and their decision-making when leading others. As they identify their own core values, they understand why some things bother them and other things do not, and why some things make them happy, satisfied, and fulfilled and why others do not.

Soldiers and Army Civilians take an oath to serve the Nation and the organization for which they work; they also agree to live and act by a new set of values—Army Values. However, taking an oath may not cause all who take it to embrace the Army Values because the core values they established in childhood and developed over many years of experiences also influence their behavior. It takes time, effort, and training to change core values.

The Army could use the process at Figure 2 and Figure 3 to help its members identify their personal core values and then follow up with education, coaching, counseling, and mentoring to integrate Army Values with personal core values. Once leaders and followers identify their core values, the process of aligning personal core values to Army Values can begin. Good leaders who emulate Army and strong, personal core values can have the most profound influence and impact on whether or not their followers accept and live by Army values.

### *Conclusion*

Core values play a major role in the personal lives of leaders as they lead people and organizations. Their values shape their beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and thinking. To be effective, leaders must be aware of the motivational factors that make people behave the way they do. Values provide the catalyst for actions, decisions, and behaviors. Therefore, it becomes important that leaders and followers identify their personal core values while establishing the goals and objectives of the organization.

The character of leaders is grounded in such core values as integrity, trust, truth, and human dignity, which influences their vision. Values help form an organization's identity and culture in conjunction with the mission and vision. Leaders must mirror their own core values in their professional and personal behaviors. When leaders integrate their personal core values with the goals, objectives, and values of the organization, they can achieve greatness for themselves, their followers, the organization, and the Army.

### *How to Determine Your Personal Core Values*

The four steps of instruction below (using the personal values table at Figure 2 of this chapter) will help leaders identify their values.

Step 1	Go through the table the first time, and circle any and all of the values that you would risk your life for. Add values that aren't there, but are important to you.
Step 2	Go back through the items that you circled and narrow the list to only six. Which items are more important to you than the others? Place a star next to your top six values.
Step 3	From the six items that you identified, you can keep three. Which three will go? If all you have left in life are these three values, which would they be? Cross out three of the six so that your top three values remain.
Step 4	Rank-order your top three values. Of the three that remain, if you had to throw two away, which one would you throw away first? Label that, "No. 3." Which would you throw away second? Label that, "No. 2." So if all you had in life were one single value, which would it be? Label that, "No. 1."

Figure 2: Instructions for Determining Your Core Values

Accomplishment	Creativity	Integrity	Persistence
Accountability	Decisiveness	Leadership	Personal growth
Accuracy	Duty	Learning	Positive Attitude
Achievement	Education	Leisure	Pride
Adventure	Efficiency	Loyalty	Respect
Authenticity	Empowerment	Meaning	Self-reliance
Authority	Excellence	Money	Service
Challenge	Faith	Nurturing	Simplicity
Change	Family	Openness	Skill
Cleanliness	Fitness	Opportunity	Speed
Commitment	Freedom	Optimism	Stability
Competence	Fun	Patriotism	Success
Competition	Hard work	Peace	Teamwork
Courage	Honesty	Perfection	Trust
Conviction	Humor	Performance	Well-being

Figure 3: Personal Core Values

## Notes

John F. Kennedy, *A Nation of Immigrants* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 15-16; The great doctrine ‘All men are created equal’ incorporated into the Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson, was paraphrased from the writing of Philip Mazzei, an Italian-born patriot and pamphleteer, who was a close friend of Jefferson;” available on the Internet at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All\\_men\\_are\\_created\\_equal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_men_are_created_equal) (accessed 22 July 2008).

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Gene Klann, *Building Character: Strengthening the Heart of Good Leadership* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2006), 6.